

# Policy upsets unions

## North Brunswick: Doctor's note required

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**NORTH BRUNSWICK** — Officers of unions representing township employees said yesterday they will fight a new sick-leave policy instituted by Mayor Paul Matacera requiring all township employees to obtain a doctor's note for every day they call in sick. **FEB 26 1988**

The new policy was enacted following a "sick-out" allegedly staged by 23 police officers last weekend after they received layoff notices.

Union officials representing township workers in all three departments where workers were given layoff notices said the policy violates their contracts.

Increases in the township's 1988 budget will double the municipal tax rate, creating a fiscal crunch.

The township council passed a tentative budget last night that will increase the current municipal tax rate by 27 cents, raising the rate to 55 cents per \$100 of assessed value.

### \$3 million increase

The total budget is \$13,935,000, up almost \$3 million from last year's budget of \$11,175,000.

Increases in garbage-disposal costs and money needed to fund a new police pension plan have been cited as the main reasons for the increases. Matacera said solid waste-disposal and mandatory recycling costs alone will add \$1.1 million to the budget. Insurance costs have also increased by more than

\$300,000.

"In the contract we get 15 sick days and after three (consecutive) days out you need to get a doctor's excuse," said Joseph Mazza, vice president of the Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 1082, which represents workers in the departments of public works and human services.

"We definitely will fight this," said Mazza, who said the union would have to file a grievance with the state Department of Personnel because the workers are civil servants.

Kevin McNamara, president of the Policemen's Benevolent Association (PBA) Local 160, said the union filed a grievance against the new policy on Wednesday.

"We don't agree with that policy at all," said McNamara, adding that the union "may end up in court over the matter."

"We believe it's (the policy) arbitrary and unreasonable and we will pursue all avenues open to us," said McNamara, adding that morale within the PBA is at a "dangerously low level."

Last week 18 workers received individual layoff notices, scheduled to take effect on April 5, according to township administrator Paul Keller. An additional 108 workers received general notices telling them they could be affected by layoffs within their department.

McNamara said he had no knowledge of any organized action by the

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patrolmen last weekend nor did the PBA sanction any "sick-out".

Police Director George Lepre said the number of officers that called in sick last weekend was "above normal."

"I hope it was an instant reaction and it's all over," said Lepre.

The police director added that he hoped the patrolmen realized another sick-out would be "counter-productive" and could backfire if the overtime needed to cover the absent workers resulted in more layoffs.

Lepre said that one whole squad of patrolmen that worked on the 11 p.m. shift Friday had called in sick. All the men had to be replaced with patrolmen working on overtime and Lepre said no shifts were under-

manned because of the incident.

Matacera stressed that he was not signaling out the police pension plan as the sole cause of any increases. "It's part of an overall increase," he said.

A November referendum, which upgraded an existing police pension plan, will cost taxpayers an additional \$400,000, according to the mayor. The increase in the tax rate to pay for the plan is about 4 cents, or one-seventh of the total tax hike, according to township officials.

"We the township have to pay the piper now," said the mayor. "But it's nothing we're begrudging them."

At a press conference yesterday, the mayor also announced a year-long freeze on hiring and promotions within the municipal government.

Matacera said he hopes some of the unions would "come back and negotiate" with the township in an effort to save costs and possibly

prevent layoffs.

Township Administrator Paul Keller said notices were sent to union bargaining units last week requesting such talks but no response has been received.

Keller said he could not respond to questions about what types of concessions the township was looking for or what the unions would have to gain by renegotiating their contracts.

However, Matacera said the cost-cutting measures could include reducing raises or cutting benefit packages for workers.

"We're not looking to close our minds or our eyes to the layoffs," said Matacera. "We're looking at every option available."

Construction plans for the new municipal complex have also been put on hold for a year because of the budget hike, though the mayor said the Council would continue to look at plans for the project.